



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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## *Oculina Closure Extended*

### Small Entity Compliance Guide

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has published a final rule for Amendment 13A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic. This rule extends regulations that prohibit fishing for and retention of snapper-grouper species within the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area (OECA) for an indefinite period, with a 10-year re-evaluation by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC). The SAFMC will also re-evaluate the configuration and size of the OECA within three years of the publication date of the final rule. The final rule will become effective April 26, 2004. As current measures do not expire until June 27, 2004, there will be no break in the closed period.

The *Oculina* Bank is a 90-mile strip of coral reefs located near the continental shelf edge off central eastern Florida. These reefs consist of delicate, slow-growing ivory tree coral (*Oculina varicosa*) and support dense and diverse invertebrate and finfish communities. The SAFMC believes the actions in

the final rule provide the most biological, social and economic benefits while allowing for adaptive management. The proposed regulations would continue to protect snapper-grouper populations, *Oculina* coral and associate habitat. Such extension would also provide a hedge against the scientific uncertainty associated with the status of some snapper-grouper species and reduce the possibility that these populations may fall below sustainable levels.

This Small Entity Compliance Guide complies with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996. Any discrepancies between this document and the rule as published on March 26, 2004, in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

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